

Taking Unified Communications to a New Service Level



Multi-nationals leverage service-based communications to connect and collaborate in the global economy.

In today's global economy, people need to be able to collaborate and make decisions in real time, regardless of what time it is or where they happen to be. According to a recent study by IDG Research Services, multinational companies are adopting unified communications (UC) to make that happen.

Time to Collaborate, Not Just Communicate

The communication needs of multinational companies are evolving quickly. "The globalization of the economy requires enterprises to develop a new approach for employees to work with coworkers, partners and

customers," says Mitsuru Takayama Senior Director in the Business Network Service Division at NTT Communications Corporation. "Their competitive advantage is dependant on the ability to seamlessly collaborate to make decisions, resolve problems, control costs and accelerate time-to-market—regardless of the distance between participants." At the same time, they must deal with a rapidly growing footprint that requires the integration of different communications environments.

Communications solutions are maturing to address those needs—and UC in particular allows companies to achieve new levels of connectedness. The technology enables people to more quickly and easily locate, connect and collaborate with others from any place, on any device, while integrating communications components such as voice and video.

UC takes communication and mobility into a whole new realm. "If we can change the cell mentality to one of 'communicate and decide' then we have eliminated a bottleneck in the action process," one IT leader explains. It's that kind of thinking that stimulates the productivity and efficiency gains that can make—or break—a company.

A recent online study (of 372 business and IT leaders around the world) by IDG Research Services revealed that UC is being widely adopted. Only 13 percent of respondents have no current or future plans to use the technology. Interestingly, EMEA and APAC are slightly further along on the adoption curve than the U.S.

The current focus of implementations is on core communications capabilities such as email, IP telephony,

Making the Most of UCaaS with the Right Partner

The UCaaS industry has come a long way, and multinational companies can expect a lot from providers and their solutions. "UCaaS solutions already have the features needed to avoid traditional barriers such as security, control, cost and reliability," says Mr. Takayama.

The IDG survey respondents appear savvy to the partner selection process. Among the attributes they're looking for are a strong feature set; security, reliability and management capabilities; expertise; responsiveness; on-site service; and one-stop shopping. The right partner will offer a solution backed by global reach, extensive resources and telecom carrier heritage.

NTT Communications is that partner. With infrastructure reaching more than 150 countries, the company is renowned for reliable, high-quality security, hosting, voice, data and IP services, as well as managed networks expertise. NTT Communications can tend to every need and ensure the very best UCaaS experience.

For more information, please visit www.ntt.com



VoIP and instant messaging; future plans point to complex functions including collaboration tools, voice and video conferencing, web conferencing, desktop sharing and, to a slightly lesser degree, presence- and communications-enabled business processes (CEBP).

What’s driving that adoption? Business and IT leaders confirm UC promises more than just communications. The majority expect the technology to also satisfy their maturing business needs by increasing productivity, enhancing collaboration and fostering connectedness within their organizations. Ultimately, a respondent notes, UC can help “increase the efficiency and productivity of our staff, and thus increase the profitability of the company.”

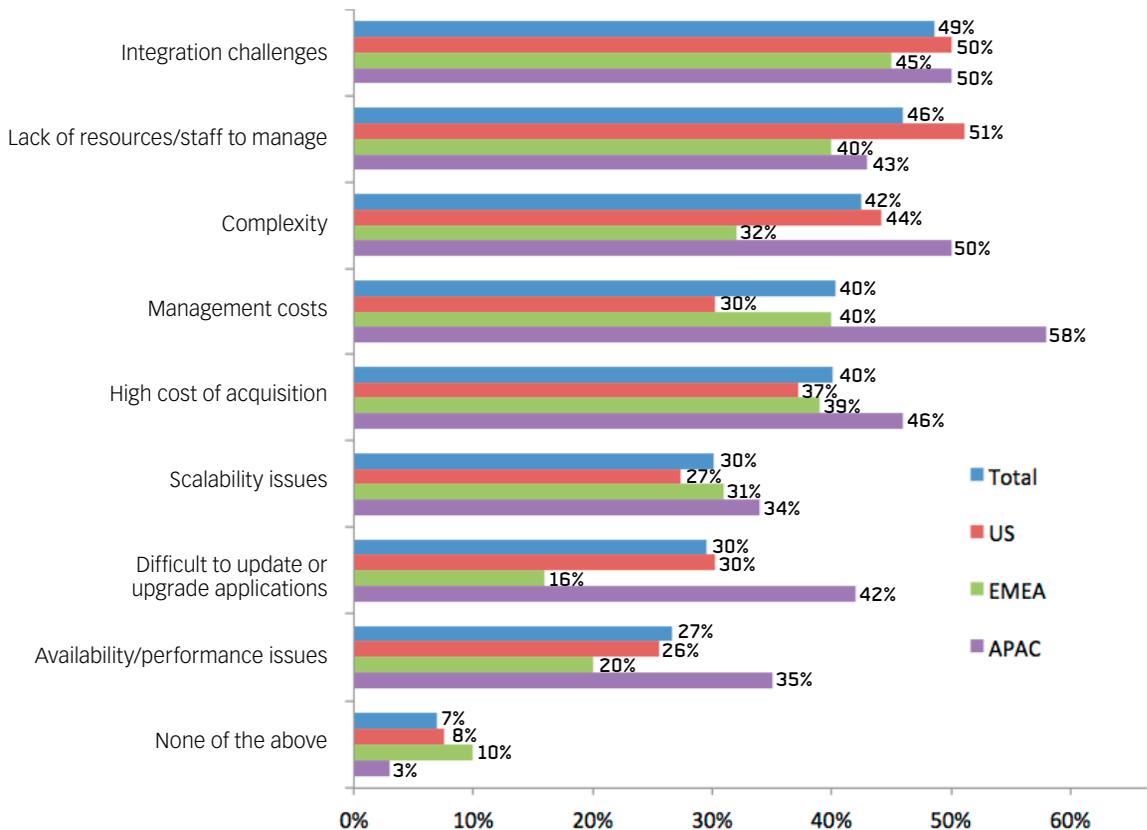
Taking UC to the Cloud

Unified communications is available in several delivery models. Companies can opt to manage their own equip-

ment on-premise, offload that management to a third party as a service, or architect some combination of the two with a hybrid, or mixed, approach. Ever-growing user demands and sprawling corporate footprints have many business and IT leaders now favoring a service delivery model.

Unified communications as a Service (UCaaS) is a relatively new but exciting delivery option that allows multinational companies to purchase UC services on a hosted, pay-as-you-go basis. Such services bundle multiple communications modalities—such as voice, video, collaboration, and web conferencing—so companies can tailor an environment that reflects their unique requirements and will expand easily with user demand. The provider manages the communications environment in accordance with strict service level agreements (SLAs). And it’s this service host that handles messy but critical tasks such as deploying new features, upgrading as necessary, managing patches, and more.

Challenges Associated with On-premise Deployment of UC



Source: IDG Research, 372 qualified respondents (172 US; 100 EMEA; 100 APAC)

Dispelling Concerns ... Over Security, Reliability and Cost

When it comes to UCaaS, many companies are still just in the planning or consideration phase. What will it take to move them into action? Dispelling some common misperceptions is a good start.

MISPERCEPTION: UCaaS solutions aren't ready for real-world challenges. Respondents demonstrate a distrust of UCaaS solutions, implying the technology is not ready for mainstream adoption. In fact, 60 percent are concerned about security and 44 percent are worried about control, among other issues like access to data.

REALITY: Many UCaaS solutions are more than ready. Some solutions actually offer greater security and control than on-premise deployments. UCaaS solutions feature state-of-the-art security protection and customer environments that can be isolated by running dedicated applications. Customers also enjoy full visibility into their environment and can assume varying levels of control.

MISPERCEPTION: The reliability of communications is too important to outsource. Some 39 percent of respondents fear that moving to a service-based model could negatively impact application reliability. They question whether relinquishing mission-critical functions (like communications) to providers is appropriate when any downtime could be catastrophic.

REALITY: UCaaS providers base their reputations (and their revenue streams) on service quality. No service provider would survive without meeting the stringent requirements of service level agreements (SLAs). Performance, availability and scalability are core tenets of service delivery and can make for more reliable environments. In fact, a network service provider can assure fully redundant, end-to-end quality with carrier-grade service.

MISPERCEPTION: The costs involved in service delivery are too high. Forty-eight percent of respondents indicate that cost implications can be a barrier to adoption. Much of that concern stems from the legitimate need to maximize their investments in existing, on-premise systems.

REALITY: UCaaS offers a lower total cost of ownership than on-premise solutions. Contrary to some beliefs, there are dramatic cost benefits associated with UCaaS. These come in the form of capital and licensing savings, as well as management and human resource efficiencies—not to mention predictability in cost structure. All of this results in a very compelling ROI.

MISPERCEPTION: Migrating to UCaaS is too much of a change. Some 41 percent of respondents express concern about how well staff and end users would adapt to a new communications delivery model. People are used to doing it the traditional way and may not readily embrace change.

REALITY: Service deployments are the norm for many IT functions. As service delivery models permeate every aspect of business—from human resources to sales and marketing—and multinational companies are becoming much more comfortable with this “new” approach. Communications is just the next piece of IT (albeit an important one) to migrate to the cloud.

“For IT organizations, the service model is a great way to deliver UC in an effective, flexible and coordinated manner, leveraging the service provider’s technical expertise in implementing and managing complex communications environments so internal IT resources stay focused on supporting business development,” says Mr. Takayama.

It’s a business win, too. “UCaaS facilitates interaction between geographically dispersed employees, partners and customers to support faster and more elaborate communication with the most sophisticated, state-of-the-art capabilities—which, in turn, drives business innovation and competitive advantage,” says Mr. Takayama.

It’s not surprising that business and IT leaders are very open to deploying UC as a service. A remarkable 52 percent of respondents have already deployed/tested UCaaS or are planning to in the near future. Another 24 percent say they will consider UCaaS. APAC appears to be the furthest into deployments, with the U.S. lagging considerably.

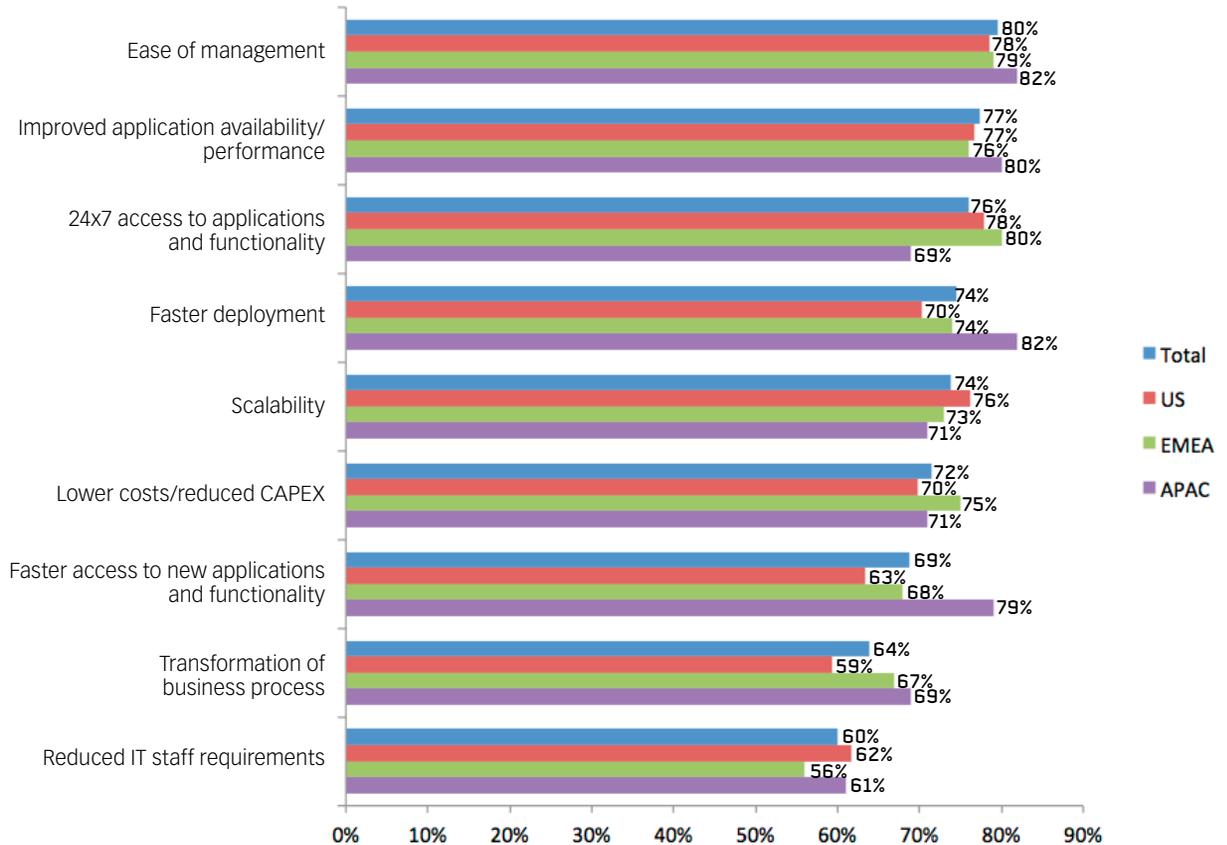
Advantage for the Taking

An IT professional adamantly says “hosting on-premise [solutions] is becoming less attractive each day.” The subsequent trend toward UCaaS can be attributed to a combination of factors.

On one hand, business and IT leaders admit that they struggle with on-premise models. The research results highlight integration (49 percent), staffing (46 percent), and complexity (42 percent) as the most notable pain points. With a service deployment, says a respondent, “management, complexity and integration are addressed by the service provider.” Performance issues also undermine on-premise deployments; respondents express concern over scaling, upgrades and availability. Cost concerns, too, surfaced—and, according to Mr. Takayama, “if enterprises deploy UC as a service, they can dramatically reduce capital and operational costs.”

On the other hand, respondents recognize the advantages of service delivery. UCaaS’ greatest expected impact seems to be on availability, with respondents citing 24x7 access (64 percent), faster access to new functions (56 percent), and increased scalability (50 percent). “Being able to provision, scale and go live with services in minutes rather than days or weeks is very attractive,” an IT leader explains.

Importance of Potential Benefits of UCaaS (Percent Rating Critical/Very Important)



Source: IDG Research, 372 qualified respondents (172 US; 100 EMEA; 100 APAC)

Improved ease of management and faster deployment also ranks high, as does increased performance. “UCaaS provides a collaboration environment that is ready to use, delivered to all enterprise sites simultaneously without having to reconsider the integration of heterogeneous on-premises solutions,” says Mr. Takayama.

There is resounding agreement that UCaaS can provide more functionality than traditional approaches. In fact, 73 percent of all respondents (90 percent in Asia) expect to use more features if they deploy UC as a service. And they’ll be able to use those features faster, as one respondent clarifies: “Implementing UCaaS would make some of the more advanced features more accessible and easier to implement—compared to doing it in-house where we have skill, talent and time limitations.”

Some companies are transitioning to UCaaS thoughtfully. “We’re talking about one of the most enduring, accepted forms of communications being moved into a new operating environment,” cautions one IT professional.

A hybrid approach to UC is popular among respondents, with a full 74 percent indicating that some applications are better suited for on-premise delivery. Optimizing existing UC investments is an important consideration, as is ensuring security, and spreading of risk. Many respondents also believe a hybrid model is an effective way to prepare for full migration to the cloud.

Bottom Line

Business and IT leaders alike are reveling in all the potential benefits of UCaaS. Those benefits include everything from ease of management and faster deployment to improved application performance and 24x7 application access. UCaaS increases the velocity with which information travels and can potentially eliminate any time latency. As one IT leader explains it, “that just has good written all over it.” Add to that the cost advantages and adopting UCaaS becomes nothing short of common sense.